

Here is a summary of the PMUA public meeting held on March 17, 2009. Our goal is to present factual information only and not to editorialize or comment on what occurred. There are plenty of places where you can read commentary, if you wish to do so. This will inevitably be incomplete because although we tried to take copious notes, we are sure we missed something. We are requesting an official transcript of the meeting and will post it as soon as we get it.

Meeting took place at the Union County College Annex. The entire room was full and people spilled into the hallway. We estimate there were at least 200 people there. There were some people either holding or wearing Dump Mapp t-shirts. Several people in the audience were PMUA employees. We know this because they either spoke out during public comment and/or were wearing clothes that identified them as such.

Board members tried to clarify information contained in the flyer we distributed and likened the Shared Services fee to school taxes.

The Board moved through the agenda approving every item. We will post when we get a copy.

Ms. Brokaw began public comment by establishing the rules as follows:

- Each person wishing to speak would have two minutes to do so
- Any person speaking must state name and address
- Any person speaking must face the board and not address the audience
- There would be a change from the last meeting where a resident gave his time to another resident. No one would be allowed to give their time to anyone else.

After the first two comments were shared the first Pro PMUA and the 2<sup>nd</sup> criticizing the PMUA, Ms. Brokaw established another rule, no applause after comments.

Most of the rules were loosely enforced at best. Many people spoke out of turn, for longer than two minutes, addressed the crowd, etc. The enforcement of the rules was very obviously dependent on the nature of the comment. However, we will make no further comment on that issue.

The following is a summary of the public comments made. Please note: These are not verbatim. They are based on notes taken during the meeting and are generally accurate although by no means quotes. Residents' names have been changed to initials and only street addresses are included because we have not contacted them to get their permission to use their names and addresses on this site. PMUA employee names are included as they are public servants and have no expectation of privacy.

-PMUA Employee Agurs Cathcart began his comment with a rhyme. After reciting Ring Around the Rosie he went on to describe his perception of the meaning of the rhyme as related to diseases and garbage collection. He stated that the work the PMUA does is about public health and safety. He further explained that part of his duties is the "orderly

pick up of garbage” and that he follows the trucks to make sure the “guys” on the truck are doing their jobs. There was no response from the Board.

-BK from Pemberton Avenue was concerned that he pays \$2600 per year to the PMUA. He expressed concern that opting out is inconvenient and questioned where the code authorizes PMUA to charge residents a shared services fee. There was no response from the Board.

-LP from Edwin Place a senior citizen expressed concern that PMUA’s rates are too high. He explained that he used to work in the “garbage business” and that he never charged such high fees. There was a comment from the Board correcting something LP said, although I did not write it down and do not want to remember incorrectly.

-PMUA employee WR from Watchung Avenue (initials used because we could not confirm his employment because he is not listed in DataUniverse as a PMUA employee) expressed his satisfaction with PMUA’s services. There was no response from the Board.

-PMUA employee D from Hillside Avenue(single initial used because we couldn’t hear her last name and we could not confirm her employment because she is not listed in DataUniverse as a PMUA employee) was very complimentary of PMUA’s services, employees, and work environment.

-Resident from West 4<sup>th</sup> Street expressed her frustration that she received a \$25 extra charge from PMUA because the lid on her can was not closed completely. Her frustration stemmed from her position that when she placed the can at the curb it was shut. However, it is her belief that someone walking by may have opened it to toss something into it. When she called PMUA she was told that she needs to watch her garbage can more closely and the charge was not refunded. Unsure whether there was a response specifically about this.

-PC from Carnegie Avenue questioned the legality of the shared service fees, the cost of shared service fees which by PC’s calculations are \$13,000 per day. Further, PC asked what the 1.2 million dollars paid to PMUA by the city which is listed in the city budget as “solid waste contribution” covers.

Mr. Watson responded by explaining that as Director of Public Works 16 years ago the sewer maintenance was not adequate resulting in residents from the Sleepy Hollow section suing the city for damages due to sewer back ups. He stated that PMUA is maintaining the sewer systems which is part of the costs incurred. He also stated that there are many residents who are struggling financially and that the PMUA bill is the last bill they pay. He explained that even when the bill is not paid PMUA still picks up the garbage when a private hauler would not. He referred PC to speak to Ms. Leslie London, attorney for PMUA, about the shared services fees and stated that the city of Plainfield has been locked in at the 1.2 million contribution since 1994 and that no longer covers the shared services.

-NS from Myrtle Avenue explained that when she first moved into her home she was never informed that there would be a fee for extra bags of garbage. Upon moving into her house she put out several extra bags and was charged \$25 per bag. She asked whether the PMUA had any information packets for new residents so that something like that would not happen to anyone else. The Board responded that they do not know when there is a new resident until the city lets them know and suggested that neighborhood associations should give that type of information to new residents. He also suggested that if there is no neighborhood association in your neighborhood, you should start one.

-Resident expressed that he understands both the positive and negative comments from the public, but that before he considers opting out of service from PMUA he will give serious consideration to the fact that the majority of PMUA employees are Plainfield residents and that he believes that we should take care of our own.

-M with two homes one on Central Avenue and one on Berkeley Terrace expressed frustration. One of his homes is vacant and has been that way for over a year but he receives PMUA bills that reflect the usage of the house when it was occupied. When he inquired at PMUA, he was told that they use the prior year's usage to calculate and that the bill would be rectified in 2009 reflecting the minimal usage of the vacant property during 2008. However, his first bill of 2009 has not been corrected. He also stated that PMUA employees should receive more training in customer service and that we as residents would like to be treated with respect when we contact the PMUA.

-L of Stelle Avenue asked how the PMUA determines when a bulk pick up is over the weight limit because she received a bill for that very offense from the PMUA. Mr. Watson responded by stating that the PMUA has estimations of what items weigh and uses those estimations to make that determination.

JW of Belleview Avenue asked if there could be a reduction of fees if there were only weekly pick up of garbage. She explained that as a senior citizen she does not have enough garbage to require pick up twice weekly. She said she barely has enough food so there isn't much to throw away. The Board responded by telling her that there is a survey being conducted by PMUA asking for residents' opinions on issues like that.

-SL of Watchung Avenue a resident of Plainfield for 2 years who previously lived in Summit questioned the rate used by the PMUA for sewage service. He stated that based on his calculations it costs \$1 per 100 ft cubed to get clean water into Plainfield homes but \$1.72 per 100 ft cubed to dispose of that water. He questioned what the "magic" was in Plainfield that made the water more valuable on the way out. He also handed the Board a letter that he had sent to Mr. Perry on February 10, 2009 but had not been responded to yet. He asked for a written response to his letter from the PMUA and offered to give residents present a copy of the letter.

-PMUA employee Howard Smith who is not a Plainfield resident made complimentary remarks about the PMUA.

-LB of Hillside Avenue asked the Board why the opt out application is not available online, why the process is so difficult for residents, and how the opt procedures were established. Mr. Watson responded by saying that they are not trying to make it easy for residents to opt out. Ms. London responded that the procedures for opting out were established by the authority on May 12, 1998.

-KS from Rose Street expressed his frustration because he owns a vacant lot directly behind his home and has to pay PMUA charges for both despite the fact that there is no garbage collection or sewage usage for the back lot. The Board responded by suggesting KS seek to merge the properties. One member of the Board said the same thing had happened to him.

-AC of Carnegie Avenue asked the Board for more specific information on the senior program that Mr. Cathcart referred to earlier. The Board's response initially was that the program had not been fleshed out yet. Then Mr. Watson responded that the senior program is set by state statute. There was some reaction from the crowd including commentary out of order that the PMUA did not have a plan. The Board assured those present that more information would be available soon.

-HM of West Fifth Street, investor in Plainfield, and lifelong resident expressed a lot of frustration with the PMUA. He held up a folder full of documentation related to the PMUA and reiterated that the PMUA is not receptive to concerns. He specifically mentioned that he is currently being billed \$8000 by the PMUA for vacant land. He stated that when he inquired about it he was told by PMUA employees to just pay the bill because they knew he had the money.

-One resident expressed his belief that the problem is not with the PMUA, but with the illegal immigrant population. He stated that the illegal immigrant population generates a certain number of pounds of garbage. Sorry I cannot elaborate further because I was having a difficult time understanding the comment.

Mr. Watson made a comment about the PMUA applying for a grant for a new pump at Rock Avenue which will cost \$1,000,000. He stated that the grant would cover 50% of the costs and that the remainder would be funded through no interest loans. We are not sure at this time whether this was in response to a question raised or unsolicited.

After asking if there were any other residents who wanted to speak, the meeting was adjourned. Some people remained and spoke to Ms. London, Mr. Watson, and to other members of the audience. Several audience members distributed information or exchanged information.